

Arlington

MASTER COMPOSTERS

Forty-sixth Edition

September 2005

The **MASTER COMPOSTER** Program of Arlington is in partnership with Texas to dramatically decrease yard and household waste going to landfills by inspiring and educating our citizens to reduce, recycle, and reuse.



Master Composter Meeting

7:00 p.m. Thursday, October 13
2nd floor of the Municipal Office Tower
201 E. Abram
(please use north entrance)

Fine-tuning your compost pile.

By: Jay Mertz of Rabbit Hill Farm

Please join us in October as we welcome an old-time favorite, Mr. Jay Mertz, owner of Rabbit Hill Farm and renowned expert in the study of composting and vermicomposting.

Mr. Mertz will join us all the way from Corsicana TX to discuss some recently "unearthed" backyard composting techniques. This presentation is a must for composters and gardeners so feel free to bring a guest.



Good Seats for Good Deeds

Thanks to Starbucks and the Texas Rangers, several master composters enjoyed a Ranger Game August 4th. Good seats for good deeds is a recognition program for local volunteers. We got to sit in the Starbucks Community Corner and an announcement was made during the game about the Arlington Master Composters. Those who stayed until the end of the game got to see the Rangers beat Tampa Bay 13 to 5.



Worm Compost Suppresses Insect Attacks

It's been widely known that mixing worm compost or "vermicompost" into soils growing flower and vegetables will reduce plant diseases and add significantly more nutrients to the soil than regular compost. Now, research at the Ohio State University Soil Ecology Laboratory suggests that vermicompost can suppress insect damage as well.

Researchers grew tomatoes, peppers, and beans in a greenhouse; some of the plants were grown in pure potting mix, while others were grown in potting mix containing either 20 or 40 percent vermicompost. All plants were exposed to aphids, spider mites, and mealybugs. The plants grown

in the vermicompost pots showed significantly less insect damage than those grown in plain potting soil. Researchers speculate that the vermicompost may change the composition of the plant tissue, making it less attractive to the insects.

While more research is needed to further understand the mechanism of vermicompost's effect on plants, it's clear that adding worm compost to your containers and garden will aid your plants in many ways.

For more information, go to this



article about the vermicompost research.

The above information was sent to us by Roni Crotty, the City's Environmental Specialist.

Compost Chat and Chew

by Jane Borland

The Clean-Up Begins...

Wow, what a week of striking images we have seen since Katrina hit Louisiana and Mississippi. The hundreds of thousands of people stranded by the storm, calling out for help, has been heart-wrenching. As the City of Arlington and Lamar High School have reached out to help, I have been moved, both by the unbelievable stories of struggle for survival by the families of my new students who now call Arlington home, and by the outpouring of love and concern for these same families and many more by the citizens of this great city. Thank you to all of you who have helped in whatever way you could.

So where does New Orleans go from here? As I watched image after image of the destruction zone, it occurred to me that New Orleans is now one, gigantic compost heap. The city, as you know, is at the bottom of a bowl; one that is now filled

with organic matter ranging from Chiquita bananas, to all of the food in all of those homes, to clothing, wood products, paper, grass, leaves, coffee, and worst of all, bodies of all sorts. On top of that, add fertilizer, pesticides, and who knows what other toxic chemicals, all drenched to the core. Now all of us are familiar with the not so pleasant smell of our compost piles when they get too wet, so I know we cannot begin to image what this is like. And who is going to turn this huge pile? Bulldozers, for sure, but where will they move all of this pile? In the end, nature will have to do most of the work, and I'm afraid the pile will soon turn cold, requiring years to turn it into compost. And unfortunately, what might have



New Orleans
After Katrina
photo from
b.im.craiglist.org

Calendar of Events

October 1

2-hour class at Veteran's Park

October 8

2-hour at River Legacy

October 13

Master Composter Meeting

October 15

Fall Cleanup Day

made great soil to replace that which was washed away, the end product will most likely be laced with toxins of all sorts, turning what might have been nature's best fertilizer into a massive toxic waste dump.

In closing, as we turn our piles this fall, may we all be mindful of those who have lost so much, keeping them close in our thoughts and prayers, and may we be thankful each and every day for all that we have.

Until next time, Jane Borland

The Crotchety Composter

by John Darling

How I Spent My Summer

To my surprise, the Environmental Health & Safety people (UTA's recycling epicenter) hired me to make compost all summer for a couple of hours a day. Perfect, you say, but there's always that nasty business of being careful what you wish for. It's wonderful that UTA might start serious campus-wide composting, but I am a dedicated three-season composter—fall, winter, and spring only. The result has been buckets of perspiration and a world that has shrunk to the size of a vacant UTA lot, so my comments might look like navel-gazing—more than usual, that is.

So what strange things happen as the composter's brain dissolves in the heat? One August day, without warning, I'm thinking that compost needs a more important name. It sounds sometimes like funny old people puttering among the



No doubt there's a pot of black gold at the end of this rainbow. (Did I really just say that?)

includes a lot of heavy watermelon rinds, but it's still a mess of stuff to

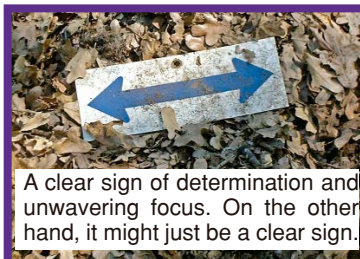


What does it take to smash these things?

form of satire? Or is it nothing? And another time there was a traffic sign, a double-headed arrow. I had to stop and stare (and sweat), certain that it was a sign of my decisiveness and forcefully focused path through life.



This is entirely real except for the fake leaf; it actually did come from a leaf bag. But why?



A clear sign of determination and unwavering focus. On the other hand, it might just be a clear sign.

That's more than enough of that. What about the hard facts? I've made six windrows, each 15-20 feet long and discovered that it takes about six hours to turn one. Yes, I am slow as molasses, but that counts a heck of a lot of stopping and watering. It's been a little dry. (And hot—did I mention that?)

Partway through the summer there was a huge nitrogenous breakthrough when the Dining

Services people started saving me their vegetable trimmings. I hauled the old bathroom scale over

and weighed one week's batch after I noticed that I wasn't turning piles anymore, I was just building new ones. The reason: an average of 89 pounds of produce every day. That

layer in and bury every day. That's over three tons per semester! And on Fridays there are a couple hundred pounds or more from Whole Foods.

This in-it-up-to-the-elbows approach to produce is uncomfortable for a guy who thinks produce is basically french fries. And it gets worse: first there was the torment of artichokes from Whole Foods. My Super Veg-O-Matic (flat shovel smashed into old wheelbarrow) just bounces off artichokes. And now it's pineapple tops from UTA and

they're just vicious.

And speaking of tough, I received a big plastic-looking mug made from corn oil and was instructed to compost the



Which of these things does not belong (in a compost pile)?

thing. It's been over three months and it's in better shape than I am. Much better. That's the strangest thing in any of the piles at UTA (except for one almost mummified rat), so there's no funny business here; this is serious stuff.

At home it's a different matter, with

new compost challenges at every turn. For instance, at New Year's my domestic supervi-

sor needs tamales. But what about those greasy wrappers? They can't be worse than a Thanksgiving turkey carcass, so I put the latest batch in a pile. No report just yet, because I forgot which pile

(continued on back)



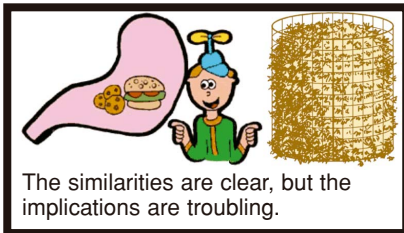
It looks tranquil at UTA Compost Central, but the pace is ferocious.

rutabagas. How about vegetational rehabilitator? I mean, compost has gigantic ramifications, implications, overtones even, so why not? Consider this: "Hey, come here often? I'm in veg rehab myself. How about you?"

At some fevered point it occurs to me that a compost pile is just a big stomach made up of zillions of teeny little stomachs. If that's true, then what is it really that we're working so hard for? The stuff that comes out of the stomach must be, uh, never mind. Musing with a melted mind doesn't produce great insights every time.

But what about the rainbow? My rule is Work in the Shade, Stupid. But when the shade ran out, I found that watering at a certain angle produced a rainbow, even a double one with enough fiddling. If that's not a reason to stop and muse, I don't know what is.

Or this, in the blistering heat: Why does it seem so odd that I've found an artificial leaf in a bag of real ones? Is it a



The similarities are clear, but the implications are troubling.

A Message from the Backyard Compost Coordinator

I have so much to share with you all. First, I want to encourage everyone to attend our upcoming meeting. I

have invited all of the master composters from Grand Prairie and Irving to join us as well. Jay's presentation will be informal and INFORMATIVE so don't miss it.

The last few weeks have been very busy for the City of Arlington due to our hurricane relief efforts. It was awesome to see so many from our community pull together to help those in need.

On a personal note, my kids are all settled in school and doing fine. As usual, it will be another busy fall for the Anderle household.

Volunteer opportunities for this

fall include the computer roundup on November 12 and as always, helping out at the compost sites on Saturday

mornings. I will notify everyone via e-mail if anything else comes up so if I do not have your e-mail address, please send it to me at anderlel@ci.arlington.tx.us.

Last, I wanted to let everyone know that I have already reserved our room

at the Oasis on Joe Pool lake for December 3rd for the annual holiday luncheon. PLEASE save the date. My little brain is already thinking about the Rights so make plans now to attend.

Thanks for all you do.

— Lorrie



Grant-funded improvements complete!

New signs, park benches, fencing, landscaping...you'll notice them the next time you visit our backyard compost demonstration sites. Improvements were made at River Legacy, Veteran's Park AND Tierra Verde.

Thanks to lots of hard work by the Parks Department and many master composters, all three sites received much-needed improvements. A special thanks to John Darling for his perseverance during the project. John helped with from beginning to end volunteering endless hours meeting, designing, hauling, planting, building and then some.

If you haven't been lately, check it out!



Crotchety, continued

they're in. And the very latest: Almost right in front of my house a large armadillo expired, and now I'm obliged to attempt real Dillo Dirt.

◆ *Don't try this at home. Wait, that doesn't sound right. Anyway, this photo has been carefully cropped for your protection.*



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